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# Asian American Experiences: A View from the Other Side

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President Truman is said to have complained about his assistants for giving him advice "on the other hand" as well as the first one. He joked about his wish to find an advisor who has only one arm. As one of the two guest editors for the present special issue on Asian American Experience, I have been surprised by the fact that all manuscripts submitted discuss what I call "negative" side of the Asian American experiences.

Beginning with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Japanese Internment in 1942 through the arrival of Indochinese refugees in recent years, the Asian American experiences have been primarily negative: discrimination, exclusion, exploitation, humiliation, oppression, prejudice, and the trauma of transition. During these periods, Asian Americans had often been depicted negatively by the majority as inscrutable Orientals, or immoral, treacherous heathens (Daniels, 1971; Gold & Kibria, 1993; McKenzie, 1928; Morales & Nishinaka, 1981).

These negative sides of the Asian American experience continue to exist. In fact, Asian American bashing as part of immigrant bashing in general, and hate crimes against Asian Americans are increasing. The glass-ceilings are not coming down. The double standards of the Affirmative Action applied to Asian Americans are being strengthened (Tsang, 1994; Watanabe, 1995a, 1995b). Although Shibutani and Kwan (1956) believed that assimilation of Asian Americans is inevitable, it is only a secondary, not the primary, integration (Gordon, 1964). The primary integration of Asian Americans is still far away, although Okihiro (1994) believes that they are moving from margin to the mainstream of the American society.

These negative experiences are a reality. I am living a daily life of this reality myself. But it is only a partial reality, not the

whole reality. There is another, a positive, side of the reality. It is desirable, if not a requirement, for a scientific journal such as this one to present both sides of the reality. I have therefore waited until the last day of our "Call for Papers." No luck. This article is presented as a "last resort."

Observers of the positive side of Asian American experiences describe Asian Americans as "model minority" (Petersen, 1966, 1971) or "paragons" (Rose, 1985). Even when they studied the negative aspect (prejudice), Daniels and Kitano (1970) found Asian Americans to be "the most successful, the most middle-class, the most respected" of the non-white groups in America (see also Kitano, 1969). Kitano and Daniels (1988) now characterize Asian Americans as "emerging minorities" (see also Kitano & Sue, 1973). The public image has also become more positive by characterizing Asian Americans as "hard-working, successful model minorities" (Hurh & Kim, 1986).

Proponents of the model minority thesis are in general mass media reporters, while its critics are mostly social scientists (Kim & Hurh, 1986). I should not, then, have been shocked by the absence of manuscripts submitted in response to the "Call for Papers" for this special issue. If the trend is still in vogue, I should not have expected to receive articles describing positive aspects of Asian American experiences.

Critics argue that the notion of Asian Americans as a model minority is a myth, not a reality. They do not believe the laudatory remarks by the majority about Asian Americans as the successful minority are sincere, nor do they believe that the majority truly admire Asian Americans. In the critics' view, the majority simply use this myth as a way of overlooking the needs of Asian Americans or creating a new form of discrimination. Thus, Chun (1980), for example, noted that the model minority thesis began emerging in the 1960s when the nation was groping for solutions to its racial unrest. At that time, the portrayal of Asian Americans as a successful minority seemed to serve a need, which was to blame African Americans and other minorities for their own failures (Hurh & Kim, 1986). Gould (1988) believes that this myth is also used by the majority to argue that Asian Americans no longer need protection under the Affirmative Action (see also Hopps, 1982; Longress, 1982; Maguire, 1980).

The debate in the social science literature result, in part, from the confusion over the definition of the population under consideration. Asian Americans are, of course, people from Asia and their descendants. But it is not easy to say who Asian Americans are. The difficulty is in part due to the fact that Asia is a vast continent ranging from eastern Turkey to eastern Russia (Siberia) including Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Syria. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has recently decided to classify the following five former Soviet Republics as Asian nations: Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) classifies people from all Asian nations as Asians including those from Middle East but excluding those from Turkey, Russia, and former Soviet Republics (the most recent IOC-member nations).

The Bureau of the Census, on the other hand, exclude people from Middle and Near East (all nations west of Pakistan) from the classification of Asians. However, the census classification adds Pacific Islanders to form a broader category of Asian/Pacific Islanders. Pacific Islanders in the census reports include Hawaiians, although they may be better combined with Aleutians, Eskimos, and American Indians to form a new category of "Native Americans."

In the social science literature, it is customary to use the census category rather than the INS classification. According to the Census Bureau, there are 18 Asian groups and 9 Pacific Islander groups (see Table 1). The 1990 census data shows that there are 7,273,662 Asian and Pacific Islander Americans, of which 6,908,638 (2.8 percent of U.S. population) are Asians and 365,024 (0.1 percent) Pacific Islanders (Bennett, 1992). The majority (57.8%) of the Pacific Islanders are Hawaiians.

Critics of the model minority thesis such as Gould (1988) usually show data on Pacific Islanders such as Guamians and Samoans or more recent immigrants from Southeast Asia—Cambodians, Hmongs, Laotians, and Vietnamese to describe their conditions in need of services and support. Proponents, on the other hand, generally refer to Asians to mean a more narrowly selected subgroups—Asian Indians, Chinese, Filipinos, Japanese, and Koreans to indicate their success in America. In fact, when the

Table 1

*U.S Population by Race, 1980 and 1990*

Race	1980		1990	
	Population	%	Population	%
U.S.	226,545,805	100.0*	248,709,873	100.0*
White	188,371,622	83.1	199,686,070	80.3
Black	26,495,025	11.7	29,986,060	12.1
Hispanic <sup>a</sup>	14,608,673	6.4	22,806,579	9.2
Other	5,767,668	2.5	9,804,847	3.9
Native <sup>b</sup>	1,534,336	0.7	1,959,234	0.8
Asian/PI	3,725,987	1.6	7,273,662	2.9
Asian	3,466,481	1.5	6,908,638	2.8
Chinese	812,178		1,645,472	
Filippino	781,894		1,406,770	
Japanese	716,391		847,562	
Indian	387,223		815,447	
Korean	357,393		798,849	
Vietnamese	245,025		614,547	
Laotian	47,683		149,014	
Thai	45,279		91,275	
Cambodian	16,044		147,411	
Pakistani	15,792		81,371	
Indonesian	9,618		29,252	
Hmong	5,204		90,082	
Malayan	**		12,243	
Bangaldashi	**		11,838	
Sri Lankan	**		10,970	
Burmese	**		6,177	
Okinawan	**		2,247	
Other Asian	26,757		148,111	
Pacific Islander	259,566	0.1	365,024	0.1
Hawaiian	172,346		211,014	
Samoaan	39,520		62,964	
Guamanian	30,695		49,345	
Tongan	6,226		17,606	

*Continued*

Table 1

*Continued*

Race	1980		1990	
	Population	%	Population	%
Fijian	2,834		7,036	
Palauan	***		1,439	
N. Mariana Is	***		960	
Tahitian	***		944	
Other PI	7,945		13,716	

\* 100 percent without Hispanic

\*\* Included in other Asian

\*\*\* Included in other Pacific Islander

<sup>a</sup> Hispanic of any race<sup>b</sup> American Indian, Eskimo, and Aleutian

term "model minority" was coined by Petersen (1966), he was referring to only one subgroup, Japanese Americans. In their study on Asian Americans, Gardner, Robey and Smith (1989) focused on six largest groups: Asian Indians, Chinese, Filipinos, Japanese, Koreans, and Vietnamese. I will do the same in this article.

Critics of the model minority thesis usually describe the negative aspect of Asian American experiences at personal or interpersonal levels. Therefore, data they use in their writings are mostly those collected from the individuals. Proponents, on the other hand, tend to use aggregate data. In this article, I will use data primarily on proportions and averages.

Critics also write about negative experiences in political terms. When Asian Americans are denied promotions unfairly, for example, and appeal this injustice, their grievances are usually dismissed. An INS report indicates that 36.6 percent of all immigrants to the United States in 1994 were from Asia. Welfare "reform" and immigration "reform" bills, if adopted into law, will have a significantly great negative impact on Asian American community. So, they sent their messages of opposition to Washington, but their voices of protest are largely ignored. They can do very little about these, because they have no political power to

do so. Democracy is, after all, a rule by and for the majority. The majority is essentially defined in terms of the number of votes at the elections. Although the size of Asian American population is increasing "rapidly," it is still very small at 3.7 percent in 1994 and that doesn't count very much.

Proponents of the model minority thesis, on the other hand, tend to focus their observations on education and economic status of Asian Americans. In this article, I will also discuss achievements of Asian Americans in education and economic arena.

### Educational Performance

Perhaps the most salient area in which Asian Americans are successful is in the field of education. In 1987 Mike Wallace reported on the model minority in the CBS program, 60 Minutes, a success story of four Vietnamese high school students who were boat people. By the same token, Doerner (1985) noted that Asians represented far beyond their population share (1.5 percent) at virtually every top-ranking university: 18.7% at Cal Tech, 18.6% at Berkeley, 10.9% at Harvard, and 8.7% at Princeton. At Columbia, enrollment in the engineering school is more than 20 percent Asian. In the 1985 Westinghouse Science Talent Search, nine of the 40 semi-finalists were Asians, as were three of the 10 winners. In 1980 only 1.5 percent of the U.S. population were Asians. In contrast, Asian Americans represented 26 percent of the undergraduate enrollment at Berkeley (Levine, 1988; for similar reports, see, e.g., *Christian Science Monitor*, 1985; *Los Angeles Times*, 1977; *Newsweek*, 1971; *Time*, 1983; and *U.S. News & World Report*, 1966). As a result of the recent decision by the University of California System Board to repeal the Affirmative Action policy, the enrollment of Asian American students at Berkeley and other UC campuses may further increase.

The success stories of Asian American students are supported by data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education. NCES conduct a number of studies including National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS). The 1988 NELS data show that among all 8th graders, Asian American children had the highest percent (35%) of "Advanced" proficiency in mathematics, in contrast to 23 percent of

white, 9 percent Hispanic, 6 percent African American, and 6 percent Native American children (Foster, Landes & Binford, 1990). One may argue that the high educational performance of Asian American children is a reflection of the high family income. Thus, data on "Advanced" proficiency was decomposed into those from low SES families and high SES families. The disaggregated data reveal a similar result. See Columns E and F in Table 2. In both cases, Asian American children performed better than children of all other races.

Another NCES study is the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The 1986 NAEP data indicate that the percent of Asian American 11th graders who performed at the "Advanced" level of reading (English) proficiency is about the same as that of white students (see Table 3), dispelling the myth that Asian American children excel only in mathematics or sciences (Foster, Landes & Binford, 1990). In fact, Asian American children in the 1988 NELS study (Table 4) scored higher in all four subjects (history, reading, mathematics, and science) than all other four groups (Snyder & Hoffman, 1994).

Table 2

*Percentage of 8th Graders by Mathematics Proficiency Level and by Race, 1988*

	A	B	C	D	E	F
Asian	14	30	21	35	18	54
White	16	37	24	23	7	40
Hispanic	28	46	17	9	4	25
Black	30	48	16	6	2	21
Native	32	49	13	6	—	—

Source: National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS)

— Data not available

A Below basic level

B Basic level

C Intermediate level

D Advanced level

E Advanced level among children of low SES (bottom 25 percent) families

F Advanced level among children of high SES (top 25 percent) families



Table 3

*Percentage of 11th Graders by Reading Proficiency Level and by Race: 1986*

	Below Basic	Basic	Advanced
White	10.4	50.7	38.9
Asian	14.8	47.3	37.9
Hispanic	21.0	58.6	20.5
Black	23.6	58.1	18.3
Native	27.3	52.4	15.4

Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress

Table 4

*Tenth Grader's Achievement Test Scores on Four Subjects by Race: 1988*

	History	Mathematics	Reading	Science
Asian	55.1	57.3	54.3	55.7
White	54.6	54.5	54.3	54.8
Hispanic	53.7	52.2	52.2	52.6
Black	51.6	49.3	49.8	49.7
Native	46.0	44.9	45.0	45.9

Source: National Education Longitudinal Study

The educational success of Asian Americans is also demonstrated in their average SAT scores (Table 5), and the average number of Carnegie units earned (Table 6). Their verbal scores are lower but their mathematics scores are higher than those of whites with their combined scores being almost the same (937 and 934). The Asian American children's combined SAT score is higher than those of all other minority groups.

More Asian American children are in college preparatory programs and plan to go to college than white or any other minority children. For example, in 1992, 50.9 percent of Asian American students were in college preparatory programs, and 83.4 percent

Table 5

*Average SAT Scores by Race: 1980 to 1990*

	Verbal			Mathematics		
	1980	1985	1990	1980	1985	1990
All students	424	431	424	466	475	476
White	442	449	442	482	490	491
Asian	396	404	410	509	518	528
Other Race	390	391	410	449	448	467
Mexican	372	382	380	413	426	429
Puerto Rican	350	368	359	394	409	405
Black	330	346	352	360	376	385

Source: Snyder &amp; Hoffman (1994)

Table 6

*Average Number of Carnegie Units Earned by Public High School Graduates by Subjects and Race: 1982 to 1992*

	Total	English	Soc Sci	Math	Science	Other
Asian	22.18	3.82	3.19	3.14	2.59	9.43
White	21.51	3.84	3.19	2.59	2.24	9.65
Native	21.32	3.92	3.22	2.09	1.96	10.14
Hispanic	21.19	3.88	3.02	2.26	1.79	10.24
Black	21.13	4.06	3.09	2.53	2.04	9.41

Source: Snyder &amp; Hoffman (1994)

planned to go college, as compared to 45.7 percent and 76.6 percent respectively of white students, less of other minority students (Table 7).

Positive or successful characteristics of Asian American students are also evident in their attendance record. The dropout rate of Asian American children (8.2 percent) is lower than that of white (14.8) and other minority children. They miss school less, and are tardy less often than children of any other groups (Table 8).

Table 7

*Percent of High School Seniors by Programs and Race: 1982 and 1992*

	College Prep		General		Vocational		Plan*	
	1982	1992	1982	1992	1982	1992	1982	1992
All	37.9	43.0	35.2	45.3	26.9	11.7	58.3	76.6
Asian	55.9	50.9	27.5	40.3	16.6	8.8	81.7	83.4
White	40.6	45.7	34.8	43.3	24.6	11.0	60.2	76.6
Black	33.3	35.6	35.1	48.9	31.6	15.4	57.5	75.2
Hispanic	24.9	30.6	37.4	56.4	37.7	13.1	45.6	75.4
Native	19.1	22.6	55.3	60.8	25.6	16.7	48.5	65.7

Source: Snyder &amp; Hoffman (1994)

\* Plan to go to college right after high school

Table 8

*Dropout and Completion Rates, and Median School Years Completed by Race*

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Asian	8.2	24.4	38.3	87.1	22.7	50.0	72.7	13.7
White	14.8	35.4	34.2	85.8	26.5	45.0	76.5	12.8
Black	22.2	27.1	41.1	86.5	22.1	53.9	77.7	—
Hispanic	27.9	41.9	45.5	75.8	27.1	56.6	67.9	—
Native	35.5	41.9	50.1	81.4	28.6	55.6	73.7	—

Sources:

For A, Foster, Landes, &amp; Binford (1990)

For B–G, Snyder &amp; Hoffman (1994)

For H, Bennett (1992)

A: High school sophomore cohort dropout rate, 1980

B: Percent of 10th graders who missed 5 or more days in first half of 1990

C: Percent of 10th graders who are late (tardy) 3 or more days in first half of 1990

D: Percent of 10th graders who never or almost never cut classes in 1990

E: Percent of 12th graders who missed 7 or more days in first half of 1992

F: Percent of 12th graders who are late (tardy) 3 or more days in first half of 1992

G: Percent of 12th graders who never or almost never cut classes in 1992

H: Median school years completed, 1991

A majority of Asian American students do go to college, as planned. Their college enrollment is higher than their population share, at all three levels. Only 2.9 percent of the general population are Asian Americans, but 4.3 percent of undergraduate, 3.8 percent of graduate, and 7 percent of professional students are Asian Americans (Table 9).

As more Asian American students are enrolled in colleges, they do complete their programs in higher proportions. Only 2.9 percent of the general population are Asian Americans, but they earned 3.8 percent of baccalaureate, 3.3 percent of master's, 3.2 percent of doctoral, and 4.8 percent of professional degrees (Table 10). It is noteworthy that Asian Indians ranked number 1 among Asian Americans (and probably among all racial/ethnic groups) in this regard. More than half of Asian Indian adult (25 or older) population earned a college degree—25.3 percent baccalaureate, 27.3 percent master's, and 5.8 percent doctoral degrees (Table 11).

Asians do better in sciences. According to the 1993 Survey of Doctoral Recipients conducted by the National Science Foundation, 36.5 percent of all Ph.D.'s in engineering, 30.5 percent

Table 9

*Percent of Population and College Enrollment by Race, 1980 and 1990*

	1980				1990			
	Pop	UE	GE	PE	Pop	UE	GE	PE
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
White	83.1	82.7	85.5	90.4	90.3	79.0	86.6	82.6
Black	11.7	9.9	6.0	4.7	12.1	9.8	5.9	5.9
Hispanic	6.4	4.2	2.6	2.4	9.2	6.2	3.3	4.0
Native	0.7	0.8	0.4	0.3	0.8	0.8	0.4	0.4
Asian	1.6	2.4	2.5	2.2	2.9	4.3	3.8	7.0

Sources: Bureau of the Census (1994); Snyder & Hoffman (1994)

Pop: Population

UE: Undergraduate enrollment

GE: Graduate enrollment

PE: Professional school enrollment

Table 10

*Percent Distribution of Degrees Earned by Level and Race, 1990*

	Population	A	B	M	D	P
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
White	80.3	82.1	83.6	78.1	67.9	85.2
Black	12.1	7.8	6.0	4.8	3.0	4.8
Hispanic	9.2	4.9	3.4	2.5	2.1	3.4
Native	0.8	0.8	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.4
Other	3.9	1.4	2.7	11.1	23.5	1.5
Asian	2.9	3.0	3.8	3.3	3.2	4.8

Sources: Bureau of the Census (1994); Snyder & Hoffman (1994)

Notes: For population data, white and black include Hispanic origin and "other" includes both citizen and noncitizen

For degree data, white and black exclude Hispanic origin and "other" means nonresident aliens.

A: Associate degrees

B: Baccalaureate degrees

M: Master's degrees

D: Doctoral degrees

P: Professional degrees

in mathematics and computer sciences, 23.4 percent in physical sciences, and 13.9 percent in life sciences were received by Asians in comparison to only 6.8 percent in social sciences (Table 12).

### Economic Accomplishments

The Doerner (1985) article mentioned earlier also featured success stories of Asian immigrants in their economic activities (see also Washington Post, 1978). These observations are supported by census data. The higher level of educational attainment of Asian Americans result in higher level of employment (lower level of unemployment). In 1992, the percentages of Asian Americans with a college degree in civilian labor force were 55 percent for males and 47 percent for females, twice the figures for non-Hispanic whites (Carnoy, 1984).

The unemployment rate of Asian Americans (4.2 percent) was lower than that of whites (4.8 percent) in 1990 (Bennett, 1992).

Table 11

*Educational Attainment of Asian Americans 25 years of age and over, 1990*

	Population	%	A	B	M	D
Chinese	1,074,009	100	59.3	21.7	15.6	3.5
Filipino	866,022	100	60.3	31.9	7.3	0.5
Japanese	623,511	100	65.6	24.4	8.8	1.3
Indian	461,631	100	41.6	25.3	27.3	5.8
Korean	452,333	100	55.6	21.9	10.6	1.9
Vietnamese	300,999	100	83.2	12.4	3.9	0.5
Laotian	65,002	100	93.4	4.6	1.8	0.2
Cambodian	62,367	100	93.6	4.8	1.2	0.4
Thai	57,443	100	66.8	19.9	12.3	1.0
Hmong	27,114	100	96.8	2.2	0.7	0.3
Other	136,082	100	58.3	21.9	17.4	2.4

Source: Shinagawa (1996)

A: Less than baccalaureate

B: Baccalaureate degrees

M: Master's degrees

D: Doctoral degrees

Table 12

*Percent Distribution of Asians\* receiving Doctoral Degrees by Field, 1993*

Field	Percent
Engineering	36.5
Mathematics/Computer Sciences	30.5
Physical Sciences	23.4
Life Sciences	13.9
Social Sciences	6.8

Source: National Science Foundation, Survey of Doctoral Recipients

\* includes non-residents

Japanese Americans have the lowest (2 percent) unemployment rate, and four other groups (Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indian, and Korean) also have 4 percent or lower unemployment rate (Table 13).

As they attain higher education, Asian Americans land themselves in "higher" occupations. The percentage of Asian Americans in the managerial and professional occupations (35.9) is

Table 13

*Percent Distribution of Asian Americans Labor Force and Unemployment*

	A	B
Chinese (a)	68	3
(b)	65	3
Filipino (a)	72	4
(b)	76	4
Japanese (a)	69	2
(b)	55	2
Indian (a)	48	4
(b)	74	4
Korean (a)	56	3
(b)	64	3
Vietnamese (a)	58	6
(b)	65	5
Thai (a)	58	6
(a)	65	5
Laotian (a)	51	2
(b)	58	5
Cambodian (a)	63	16
(b)	48	4
Hmong (a)	20	—
(b)	29	5

Source: Jiobu (1996)

A: In labor force, percent of population

B: Unemployed, percent of labor force

a: Native (U.S.) born

b: Immigrant (foreign born)

higher than that of whites (27.2) or total population (26.4) in 1990. It is noteworthy again that Asian Indians ranked number one of all Asians (and probably all others). Nearly 30 percent of Asian Indians are in professional occupations (Table 14). One of the examples of the professional occupations is, of course, college professorship. While only 2.9 percent of the population are Asian Americans, they constitute 10.3 percent of faculty in medical schools and 11 percent of faculty in engineering schools (Table 15).

With higher education and in higher occupations than other groups, Asian Americans have higher income than others (Table 16). Their median family income (\$47,021), household income (\$38,450), and individual income (\$26,051) in 1990 were higher than all other groups including whites. It is noteworthy again that Asian Indians rank number 1 among all Asians (and probably all other groups) in terms of the mean income of workers (\$60,903). This is expected in a way as they rank number 1 in

Table 14

*Percent Distribution of Asian Americans, by Occupation 1990*

	Managerial	Professional	Both
U.S.	12.3	14.1	26.4
White	—	—	27.2a
Asian	12.6	18.1	30.7
	—	—	35.9a
Chinese	15.1	20.7	35.8
Filipino	10.3	16.4	26.7
Japanese	17.5	19.4	36.9
Indian	14.0	29.6	43.6
Korean	12.0	13.5	25.5
Vietnamese	6.1	11.5	17.6
Thai	9.6	14.0	23.6
Laotian	1.8	3.3	5.1
Cambodian	4.0	5.8	9.8
Hmong	3.4	9.4	12.8

Sources: Bennett (1992) for a; Shinagawa (1996) for the rest



Table 15

*Percent of Population and Full-Time Regular Instructional Faculty in Institutions of Higher Education (Fall, 1987) by Race*

	P80	P90	FT	FM	FB	FE	FH	FS
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
White	83.1	80.3	89.5	85.3	88	87	88	91
Black	11.7	12.1	3.2	3.0	4	*	2	2
Hispanic	6.4	9.2	2.3	*	1	2	1	1
Native	0.7	0.8	0.7	1.4	1	*	1	*
Asian	1.6	2.9	4.2	10.3	6	11	7	6

\* Less than 0.5 percent

P80: Population 1980

P90: Population 1990

FT: Faculty total (Fall 1987)

FM: Faculty in medical schools

FB: Faculty in business

FE: Faculty in engineering

FH: Faculty in health

FS: Faculty in science

Source: Snyder & Hoffman (1994)

Notes: For population data, white and black include Hispanic origin

For faculty data, white and black exclude Hispanic origin

the proportions of doctoral degrees earned and of being in the professional occupations.

Asian Americans also have higher percentages of households and families earning \$100,000 or more (8.3 and 9.7 percent respectively) in 1992 than any other groups including whites (Table 17). There are also more Asian American households and families than those of whites who earned \$75,000 or more in 1990 than those of whites (15.0 and 17.7 percent vs. 9.7 and 12.2 percent respectively). In addition, 13.9 percent of Asian American males in civilian labor force had earnings of \$50,000 or more in 1990, as compared to 12.5 percent of whites. Similarly, more Asian American (5.3 percent) year-round, full-time workers earned \$75,000 or more in 1990 than white (4.1 percent) workers of this category (Bennett, 1992).

Table 16

*Median Income by Race, 1980 and 1990*

Race	1980a	1990a	1990b	1990c
All	\$19,917	\$35,353	\$29,943	\$24,965
White	20,835	41,922	31,231	25,638
Black	12,598	23,550	18,676	—
Hispanic	13,712	23,431	22,230	—
Native	13,723	23,912	19,900	8,284
Asian	22,713	47,021	38,450	26,051
	—	—	53,104*	22,579*
Japanese	27,354	—	59,689*	28,257*
Indian	24,990	—	60,903*	27,815*
Filipino	23,680	—	58,718*	21,416*
Chinese	22,559	—	52,774*	22,908*
Korean	20,450	—	47,958*	20,079*
Vietnamese	12,840	—	44,040*	17,590*
Thai	—	—	49,124*	19,738*
Laotian	—	—	33,110*	13,634*
Cambodian	—	—	32,518*	14,364*
Hmong	—	—	20,648*	9,923*
Other	13,890	—	47,218*	21,104*

Sources: Bureau of the Census (1983a, 1983b) for 1980a; Bureau of the census (1992) for 1990a,b; Bennett (1992) for 1990c; Shinagawa (1996) for data with \* a: Median family income b: Median household income c: Median income of year-round, full-time workers 25 years old and over (Bennett data) \*: Mean wage/salary income of workers between the ages of 18 and 64 (Shinagawa data)

A study by the Rand Corporation about the wage gap between wages of immigrant workers and those of the native-born (the majority) workers has just been released. The study found that immigrants from Mexico and Central America enter the U.S. labor market with very low wages and experience a persistent wage gap, and the gap tends to become wider over time. Immigrants from Asia, especially those from Japan, Korea, and China, on the other hand, enter with wages much lower than those of the native-born (white) workers but their earnings increase rapidly. Within

Table 17

*Median Income and Earnings*

	Households			Families		
	A	B	C	A	B	C
All	\$30,786	4.9	—	\$37,222	6.3	—
Asian	38,153	8.3	15.0	43,418	9.7	17.7
White	32,368	5.3	9.7	39,320	6.8	12.2
Black	18,660	1.5	—	21,761	1.9	—
Hispanic	22,848	1.8	—	24,926	2.0	—

Sources: Bennett (1992); Bureau of the Census (1994)

A: Median income in current dollars, 1992

B: Percent of households/families earning \$100,000 or more, 1992

C: Percent of households/families with income of \$75,000 or more, 1990

10 to 15 years, their wages reach parity with those of native-born workers (Schoeni, McCarthy & Vernez, 1996).

With higher earnings and income, Asian American families (11.9 percent) and individuals (14.1 percent) are below poverty line less than three other minority groups, although more than whites (6.9 and 9.0 percent respectively). Except for "boat people" of Cambodians, Hmongs, Laotians, and Vietnamese, 5 percent or less of Asian Americans receive public assistance payments (Table 18). The Indochinese refugees on welfare are much higher than the rest of Asian Americans because of special circumstances which led them to come to the United States. Hmongs are mostly settled in Minnesota, primarily because of rather liberal welfare benefits of that state. With no prior exposure to industrial world but recruited by U.S. to assist CIA for its covert operations during the Vietnam War, Ungar (1995) argues that Hmongs "deserve" American public assistance.

### Other Factors

A variable related to educational and economic factors is the ownership of computers. According to a study conducted for the National Telecommunications and Information Administration of the U.S. Department of Commerce, the highest proportion of

Table 18

*Percent Distribution of Poverty and Public Assistance*

Race	1980A	1990A	1990B	C
All	9.6	—	—	—
White	7.0	6.9	9.0	—
Black	26.5	27.8	31.0	—
Hispanic	21.3	26.2	29.3	—
Native	23.7	27.2	31.2	—
Asian	10.7	11.9	14.1	—
Japanese	4.2	—	4 a	2
			12 b	1
Filippino	6.2	—	7 a	3
			6 b	4
Indian	7.4	—	8 a	2
			10 b	2
Chinese	10.5	—	8 a	2
			16 b	5
Korean	13.1	—	12 a	2
			14 b	4
Vietnamese	35.1	—	6 a	14
			25 b	11
Thai	—	—	7 a	1
			12 b	2
Laotian	—	—	40 a	15
			33 b	19
Cambodian	—	—	43 a	8
			40 b	27
Hmong	—	—	63 a	25
			63 b	36
Other	32.2	—	—	—

Sources: Bureau of the Census (1983a, 1992); Jiobu (1996) for data with (a) and (b)

A: Families below poverty line

B: Persons below poverty line

C: Persons receiving public assistance payments a: Native (U.S. born) b: Immigrant (foreign born)

computer owners are Asian Americans (39.1 percent), followed by whites (28.6 percent), Native Americans (20.7 percent), Hispanic Americans (13.1 percent), and African Americans (11.1 percent). Of course, the computer ownership *per se* is not a "proof" of success in general. But it may be an indicator of educational and economic success. Referring to this information, Marriott (1995) tries to explain the lowest percent ownership of computers by African Americans in terms of their history, culture and psychology, although she admits that education and economics are also powerful factors.

This article is concerned more with educational and economic factors and less with history, culture or psychology. But we may comment on one area of culture. Asian Americans are better law-abiding citizens, as they violate laws less than any other groups. In 1980, when 1.6 percent of the general population were Asian Americans, they accounted for 1 percent of arrests for violent and property crimes. While 2.9 percent of the general population Asian Americans, they comprise only 0.2 percent of population on probation (Table 19).

### Discussion and Conclusion

Asian Americans score higher on SAT and other standardized tests, more of them go to colleges and graduate and professional

Table 19

#### *Percent Distribution of Arrests and Probation*

Race	Pop80	Arr80	Pop90	Pro88
All	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
White	83.1	81.9	80.3	69.0
Black	11.7	41.0	12.1	30.1
Hispanic	6.4	—	9.2	12.3
Native	0.7	1.1	0.8	0.7
Asian	1.6	1.0	2.9	0.2

Sources: Kitano & Daniels (1988) for Arr88; Shinagawa (1996) for Pro88

Arr80: 1980 arrests for violent crimes and property crimes

Pro88: Persons with a known status in 1988

schools, more of them earn doctoral and professional degrees. The data from the National Center for Education Statistics indicate that Asian Americans do perform better than all other groups including the majority most of the time, and almost always better than all other minority groups. In this sense, Asian Americans are truly the "most successful" minority.

Critics of the model minority thesis are not impressed with this type of "educational success." Instead, they want more bilingual education and other educational programs emphasizing diversity. Diversity, however, is neither an inherent good nor an inherent evil. It is a fact of social life that leads to enrichment as well as conflict (Longress, 1996). It seemed to have gone toward conflict. Multicultural education has been advocated by other minority groups as well, but when Asian Americans did so, it led to a fear, among whites, of a new "yellow peril." Ungar (1995) proposed "the new ground rules" under which a group can "choose to stand apart" and "stick together" to get ahead. His writings are used, as evidence, to justify ordinary Americans' (whites') fear that their country is being taken from them (Brimelaw, 1996). Schlesinger (1992) goes one step further and blames the hyphenated Americans for their "disuniting" of America by means of diversity education.

Whether we should advocate for traditional (Eurocentric) education or multicultural education is a theoretical or an ideological question. Whether Asian American students perform better than other students in one or another type of education is an empirical question. This article deals with the latter question.

Critics of the model minority thesis point out that while earnings and income of Asian Americans are higher, more family or household members have to work and they have to work longer hours to earn these returns. See Louie (1996) for a recent example. They are true, but they are also indicators of "positive" characteristics for success. Asian Americans are scoring higher in standardized tests, earning higher degrees, and earning more income than other groups, not because they are "created" or "evolved" more intelligently than other groups. Unless one is willing to advance such a theory of genetic causation, we can only contend that Asian Americans are more successful because they work harder and longer hours. Working hard is a positive trait.

Critics also indicate that Asian Americans may be in professional occupations, but they usually occupy undesirable positions. Many Asian American physicians, for example, are employed by large county or state hospitals as emergency room doctors, positions shunned by the majority doctors, earning less income than other doctors in private practice. Asian Americans in the academia, especially those in the science fields, also face similar experiences. They are belittled, humiliated, and denied promotions to administrative or other leadership positions (Manrique & Manrique, 1994; Watanabet 1995a, 1995b).

These observations are true, but what would be the alternatives? I don't think critics are suggesting that these doctors and professors "go back to their countries" or to change their careers. Asian Americans' willingness and ability to endure hardships are positive traits.

This article has reviewed census data and analyzed them in *aggregate* and *proportional* terms. It only says that proportionally there are more Asian Americans earning doctoral degrees and engaged in professional occupations. The absolute numbers are not greater than those of whites. It only says "on the average" (such as median income) Asian Americans earn more than all other groups. It noted that proportionally there are more Asian Americans who earn, say, \$100,000 or more than any other groups. In this sense, Asian Americans are indeed the "most middle-class" minority.

I don't know what Daniels and Kitano (1970) meant by "the most respected," but Shinagawa (1996) recently came up with a Socio-Economic Prestige (SEP) scale. The SEP scores for Asian Americans (58.6) and for whites (58.7) are almost identical (Table 20). Among Asian Americans, Indians have the highest SEP score (64.4), higher than that of whites. This is not surprising, as they rank number 1 in doctoral degrees earned, in professional occupations, and in mean wage/salary income, as noted earlier. Of course, these SEP scores were obtained from recent immigrants. But, except for Japanese, immigrants are the majority among Asian Americans (Jiobu, 1996). If we can accept the SEP scores as an indicator of respect, then Asian Americans are certainly the most respected minority.

Table 20

*Socio-Economic Prestige (SEP) Scores of Recent (1990–93) Immigrants by Origin*

Origin	Both	Male	Female
Europe	59.4	59.9	58.7
Asia	59.9	60.8	58.6
Indian	66.9	67.6	64.4
Japanese	63.2	64.9	60.5
Chinese	62.5	64.0	60.5
Korean	62.2	63.3	60.2
Filipino	60.2	59.7	60.6
Vietnamese	50.4	50.2	50.7
Other Asians	60.1	60.7	58.8

Source: Shinagawa (1996)

Asian Americans are having a great impact on this country that far exceeds their numbers, yet Americans know surprisingly little about them (Gardner, Robey & Smith, 1989). Historically, Asian Americans have made positive contributions to American society. They have worked hard and paid taxes; they have developed businesses and established industries; they have created stable family units and cohesive communities; they have participated in civic activities and have fought in America's wars. In all these and other ways, they have continually moved from marginal "sojourners" (Siu, 1952) to the mainstream of American life (Okihira, 1994). The 1990 census data do not suggest a different outcome for today's immigrants from Asia (Jiobu, 1996).

Okihira and Ojibu may be overly optimistic, as Asian Americans still have a long way to go to reach the mainstream of American life. In areas of education and economy, however, we are making a good progress. If we do the same in political arena, our journey to that elusive goal will be accelerated. Anti-immigrant mood of the day seems to move Asian Americans toward that direction (Holmes, 1996).



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